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Chapter 3

Visuals, Cultural Performances and Myths

Now our music is not merely for entertainment but is an instrument in our fight for liberation. We are creating our own narratives and establishing our own heroes.

Suman Kumar, Dalit folk actor, Banaras, 20 October 2005.

Folk paintings, wall paintings, sculptures made of terracotta and clay, and cultural performances specific to each Dalit caste like the *Chamraundha* of the Chamars, *Pasiauwa* of the Pasis, *Dhobiauwa* of the Dhobis and so on, have always been part of the cultural resources of Dalits. These cultural forms reflect the socio-economic environment in which they exist and provide them with sustenance. Before the rise of Dalit consciousness, however, none of the lower castes had any visual representation of gods since there was no concept of a temple in a fixed place or form in the absence of an organized religion (Ilaiah 1996: 187). For them, gods and goddesses take all forms and shapes in a variety of places based on their daily interaction with nature, quite unlike the upper castes whose gods remain in temples somewhat alienated from real life (ibid.: 180). Further, they did not have any visual images of heroes since their heroes emerge from real life situations (ibid.: 179). Each lower caste had its own heroes who were revered in their oral tradition through ballads and narratives without having any visual form. Thus, the heroes and gods as also the cultural performances remained a part of the cultural resources of the lower castes, rather than being transformed into political resources. With the rise of Dalit political consciousness in UP and the emergence of the BSP, which has been using cultural resources for the political mobilization of the Dalits, the heroes of each caste are being converted into political resources by acquiring visual representation in forms that allow the illiterate and semi-literate Dalits at the grass-roots

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level to easily visualize and then internalize them as symbols of their identity. In addition, these visual resources, which have taken the form of pictures on calendars, booklets, posters, statues, memorials and so on, are themselves helping to form myths and the memories accompanying these myths. Through the process of dissemination, these have now entered into their orality and collective memory in new forms and with new interpretations. As is well known the visual medium has a great impact not only because it is a vehicle for representation but also because it has the ability to inscribe itself on the memory of people. The BSP exploited this fully well. In its political strategies it created a cyclical relationship between myths, memories and visual resources to arouse the sense of caste pride and glory within the Dalits.

While searching for heroes, the first thing that the BSP intellectuals did was explore their narratives for local heroes who could fit into their logic. The next job was to give a face to these heroes. Sometimes the image appeared from the description of the hero within the narrative itself, but often they needed to create an image that would fit into the description when no photograph or other visual source was available. In the recent past, statues of Dalit heroes like Udadevi, Jhalkaribai, Suhaldev and Bijli Pasi have been installed in many roadside crossings all over UP. Pictures of heroes like Ambedkar, Kabir, Ravidas, Jhalkaribai, Udadevi and so on are also put up on the walls of Dalit houses in the form of posters or calendars. Like the upper-caste Hindus, some Hindu Dalits also hang up pictures of Hindu gods like *Ganesha*, *Hanuman*, *Durga* and so on. Buddhist Dalits have pictures or idols of Buddha in their houses. It is a noteworthy fact that calendars, posters with the images of Dalit heroes are found mainly in the houses of people living in cities or small towns.[1] In villages, pictures of Dalit heroes from their local myths are distributed free of cost during political rallies in the form of leaflets, pamphlets, handbills and so on. These are usually printed by local Dalit businessmen for politicians standing for elections from that constituency as part of their election campaign.[2]

Creation of Images

The image of Udadevi, which can now be seen all over UP, is not very old. It was created in 1953 when the National Botanical Research Institute (NBRI), Lucknow, developed a museum based on the city history of Lucknow. A painter was invited who was asked to create an image based

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on the description of Udadevi in the narratives collected by Professor K.N. Kaul, a botanist working with the Birbal Sahni Institute. In 1973, a Swatantrata Sangram Samiti, was formed which made a cement statue based on this image in the NBRI museum. The statue was not made very well and soon started cracking. Unskilled labourers were called in to fill in the cracks but in this process the image got distorted. Later when the BSP wanted to build her statues and print her portrait in posters and calendars they picked up this distorted image. That is why the statue in NBRI grossly differs from the roadside statues (Saroj 1997: 7).

Suhaldev is another icon of the Pasi caste popular in central UP. The first image of Maharaja Suhaldev was created in 1950 in Jittora near Bahraich in north UP by the local Congressmen. The Congress had organized a rally in Jittora to inaugurate a memorial of Suhaldev. Two local painters, Lalit Nag and Rajkumar Nag, were commissioned to paint the first picture of Suhaldev from their imagination. Later, Samaydeen of Gonda sculpted a statue of Suhaldev based on the painting made by the Nag painters, in which he was portrayed like a soldier astride a horse. This clay statue was later replaced by a cement one.[3] The local Raja of Prayagpur donated 500 *bighas* of land and the Jittora Lake to the Suhaldev Smarak Samiti. Earlier the statue was placed in the park in the form of a memorial. Today however the place has been renovated to resemble a temple with the statue as the idol. Many people from near and far visit it to offer prayers. A priest has been appointed to conduct the prayers. Along with prayers, the devotees also take dips in the Jittora Lake, which is believed to have medicinal properties that can cure incurable diseases especially leprosy. They believe that the blessings of Maharaja Suhaldev have endowed the waters with these magical properties. More than the Dalits, in particular, the Pasis with whom Suhaldev was earlier identified, it is the upper castes who visit his shrine because of their belief in his magical powers.[4] He has now been transformed into a god and his myth is used more by the BJP and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) for mobilizing the upper-caste Hindus of that region against Muslims than by the BSP for the mobilization of Dalits, although the BSP does sometimes mention the name of Suhaldev as a hero while mobilizing the Pasis. The RSS has installed Suhaldev's statue in Lucknow but this statue is markedly different from the one in Jittora that had been installed in the 1950s based on the painting by the Nag brothers. In the Lucknow statue, Suhaldev is shown as a valiant, military leader similar to the image of Maharana Pratap. He is wearing an iron armour, headgear, breeches, a shield in one hand with a sword tucked in his waist. On the other hand,

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the statue in Bahraich depicts Suhaldev more as a medieval folk hero wearing a crown and holding a bow and arrow.[5] Maharana Pratap is an upper-caste historical character propagated by the RSS and the attempt to carve Suhaldev in the Rana's image might be a reflection of their desire to homogenize the militant Hindu heroes and their iconographies. The residents of Bahraich, however, believe that the statue of Suhaldev in their town is the true depiction.[6]

Maharaja Bijli Pasi, a Pasi king who was supposed to have ruled over some regions of UP in the medieval period, holds an important place in the Pasi caste history. He is a symbol of caste glory for all the Dalits, proving that some of the lower castes were also kings. The ruins of his fort from where he ruled are still present in Lucknow, which has been converted into a memorial by the BSP. His victory day is celebrated there every year with great pomp and show for which a rally is organized where people from all Dalit communities congregate and cultural performances infused with political meaning are held before them. A statue of Bijli Pasi has been installed there in the image of a brave medieval warrior holding a bow and arrow. The story behind the creation of this image of Bijli Pasi is an interesting one. It was narrated by Nasimuddin Sidiqui, a former minister in the Mayawati government and close associate of Kanshi Ram. He said that when Kanshi Ram wanted the statue to be installed, he asked the sculptors to put together the best features of five of the Sikh gurus also revered by the Dalits, like Guru Arjun Dev, Guru Govind Singh, Guru Nanak and so on. If one were to observe the statue of Bijli Pasi carefully one can identify these features.[7] This image of Maharaja Bijli Pasi is also printed in calendars and posters, which shows him standing amidst the splendid ruins of his fort. Many Dalit houses, especially Pasi households, adorn their walls with it. R.K. Choudhry, one time minister in the BSP led government and presently in the SP, was the first to get this image of Bijli Pasi printed.

Installing statues of Dr B.R.Ambedkar in various places in UP was one of the most significant activities of the Dalit movement. A survey of the Azamgarh region of UP revealed that the installation of these statues is a matter of great pride for all the Dalit communities of the region that has gone a long way in constructing their identity.[8] Ram Sharan Ram, a Dalit youth living in that region, said that whenever a statue of Ambedkar is installed and garlanded on his birth anniversary, the chests of all the Dalits of that region swell up with pride.[9] An inspection of the statues of Ambedkar between Allahabad and Azamgarh showed that most of them have been copied from his picture in the Constitution of India, which

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has since been reproduced in textbooks and calendars. In the villages that were surveyed, for example, Kotwa, Chauka Khurd, Bankat Bazaar and Belisa, it was found that most statues were made by local artistes, and hence, of poor workmanship. Despite this, there is homogeneity and the colour schemes are almost identical, the coat being navy blue and the trousers being white. The statues were installed by local, mostly Dalit, villagers with the financial and political help of local BSP MLAs (Members of Legislative Assembly) or MPs (Members of Parliament). The crossing in Azamatgarh in the district of Azamgarh, where a statue of Ambedkar was installed with the financial help of Barkhuram Barma, the local BSP MLA, is now known as Ambedkar Chauraha (crossing). Another statue at Jangopur village in Azamgarh was financially supported by Malik Masood, the BSP MLA of this area. A third statue at Kajara Mor near Jaunpur district was erected with the financial help of the village pradhan belonging to the BSP.[10]

What do these statues mean for Dalit communities and their political mobilizers? First, the visual mode is highly effective for creating memories since images impact immediately. This, along with the narratives around these statues, helps in creating memories among the Dalit communities of the great symbols of dalit politics. Second, it enables communities to gain self-respect since this is a sign of their acceptance in society. It elevates their sense of identity, self-esteem and self-respect with the reflected glory of the heroes. Gaining self-respect in public space acts an antidote to their everyday humiliation that they face at the hands of the upper castes at the grass-roots level. The statues installed by Mayawati carry a special meaning for the Dalit communities. When they enter the Ambedkar Park, where the statue of Dr Ambedkar is installed, they do so with the feeling that they have a right to the place. They use it like their own house, whether it is to sit, sleep or walk. They assert their right by saying that '*Bahanji* has constructed it' (*Bahanji banwaile hai*).[11]

It has often been alleged by anti-BSP forces, mainly the SP, that the installation of statues is an attempt to capture government land. This has led to conflict and violence whenever the Dalits try to put up a statue. At many places in Azamgarh the police has imposed an undeclared ban on the installation of statues of Dalit heroes, especially of Ambedkar, for this reason. The Thakurs or the upper-caste landowners and the middle-caste Yadavs of that region, who owe their allegience to the ruling SP, allege that the installation of the statues of Ambedkar by the Chamars and Pasis is a deliberate attempt to grab land. Omkar Singh, a fifty-year-old Thakur living in village Majhauwa of Azamgarh district, whose family

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owns most of the land of that village, said heatedly that all the upper castes felt greatly angered when they saw the statues of Ambedkar and emphasized that they would not be responsible if they lost control and resorted to bloodshed.[12] Ram Nagina Yadav, another influential man of the village, teaching in the local primary school, who belongs to the Yadav community and supports the SP, voiced his skepticism about how installing statues of Ambedkar all over the place would help in the socio-economic development of the lower castes. Instead, he said that they anger the other castes and lead to rivalry, tension and violence in the village.[13] After the defeat of the BSP in UP in 2004 and the coming of the SP, the number of statues of Ambedkar has considerably decreased. The sculptors of Azamgarh also mention that, earlier, policemen bought statues of Ambedkar to replace any damaged ones in order to prevent any untoward incident from taking place between the members of the two parties who might blame each other for the breakage.[14] Thus the statue of Ambedkar, which is a constituent element in the identity construction of the Dalits, has also hurt the sentiments of the other castes living in that region. This has often led to violence and bloodshed as in 2002 when the Thakurs of village Majhauwa fired gunshots during the birth anniversary celebrations of Dr Ambedkar organized by the local BSP leaders.[15] During the reign of the BSP, when the installation of statues was a common event, such incidents occurred very frequently in different regions of UP.[16] In the erection of these statues, Mayawati, however, as has been mentioned earlier, saw the assertion of Dalit identity, which is why the construction of memorials and the installation of these statues was given top priority in the BSP's political strategy.

The BSP's Myth Making of Ambedkar and the Local Heroes of UP

The mapping of the process of myth making of Ambedkar in UP is an interesting one. Ambedkar was highly popular among the people of Maharashtra. As the maker of the Constitution of India he also gained popularity among the rest of the Indians, but in UP he was not as well known in the initial period of his active life. His name was popularized by Swami Achhutananda while he was involved in the Adi Hindu movement with which Ambedkar had a close association. The Poona Pact of 1932, one of whose signatories was Swami Achhutananda, further consolidated their friendship. That Ambedkar respected Swami Achhutananda is evident from the fact that he opened or closed his letters to the latter

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with the word *Pranam* (a word to show highest regard in North India).[17] Ambedkar was also a close associate of Hari Prasad Tamta, the editor of *Samta*, a newspaper published from Almora during the colonial period. Thus, Ambedkar's fame spread in this region both orally through the discussions Tamta had about him with his friends and through print by the newspaper *Samta*, which regularly published Ambedkar's writings. Also, the educated Dalits of North India who were readers of newspapers had read about Ambedkar's role in the Poona Pact. These people began to subscribe to Dalit newspapers published from Maharashtra, which contained the writings of Ambedkar. In this manner they became aware of his opinions and writings and he thus gained reputation in this region (Bechain 1997: 145).

After independence, the RPI, which had been founded by Dr Ambedkar in Maharashtra, was expanded in UP. With the spread of the political discourse of the party, the myth of Ambedkar became a part of the collective psyche of the people. The image of Ambedkar that was carved in the mind of the common Dalit was one of a super human (*maha manav*), the messiah of the Dalits, and the one who would lead them towards enlightenment through education and development. The politics of the RPI began from western UP and extended towards Kanpur and its adjoining regions. Agra had started emerging as a hub for Dalit politics and Ambedkar addressed a rally here on 18 March 1956 which was attended by thousands of educated Dalits. Through such meetings, Ambedkar's fame further spread in the region. Initially, his photograph was popularized through posters and pamphlets published and distributed by the RPI for disseminating information about forthcoming meetings. The image was that of a suited and booted, westernized gentleman holding a copy of the Constitution in one hand. This image appeared to the common Dalits as a symbol of awareness through education and the fight for a better future. It also helped deconstruct the stereotypical notion of Dalits as being oppressed, suppressed and illiterate.[18]

After Dr Ambedkar's death his photographs were published in calendars and posters and his statue was erected. His photographs were also published on the covers of Dalit magazines, newspapers and booklets. This image reached the common and illiterate Dalits. When they heard his mythical eulogies in everyday political discours and occasional speeches, his image as a saviour and the architect of Indian democracy began to get ingrained in their minds. In some places he was referred to as an incarnation of the Buddha while in other places he was hailed as being more knowledgeable than the upper castes.[19]

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When the BSP came within the political fray in UP in the mid-1980s, there were very few statues of Ambedkar in the state. The only ones that had been installed were by the government and semi-political and social organizations. After the launching of the BSP and its strategy of aggressive identity assertion, Ambedkar became a symbol of Dalit identity. His statues began to be installed by Dalit politicians and activists in various places in UP. But since Dr Ambedkar was not well known among the Dalits at the grass-roots level in this region unlike in Maharashtra where he is a household name, this image was thrust upon the people through the process of political dissemination. In the first phase of the BSP, before it understood the peculiar society and culture of UP in which saints, seers, epical heroes and local heroes occupy an important space in the minds of the people, both upper-caste and lower-caste, it tried to mobilize Dalits using the Ambedkarite language which was dominated by the consideration of social and economic factors (Narayan 2001: 144). In the latter phase, when the BSP truly understood its people, it had to change its political language from that of Ambedkar, like in the case of Maharashtrian Dalit movement, to one that was interspersed with the cultural symbols of the people of this region. Thus, its political strategy included putting up statues of local cultural heroes, saints and also of Dr Ambedkar, and organizing celebrations around their memories in the regions where they are popular so as to install them as important myths in their collective memory. In this strategy, Ambedkar and the local cultural heroes of this region were projected as being complementary to each other rather than as binary opposites. Table 3.1 shows the local heroes popular in different places of UP that were used by the BSP as symbols of Dalit identity.

As can be seen from Table 3.1, the BSP selected myths that were popular in particular regions to mobilize the people of that region. The myths are not merely small anecdotes or incidents about lesser known characters but long texts about persons who played significant roles in history and whose life stories could be used as inspirations to motivate and mobilize the communities concerned. The narratives selected were such that they facilitated the creation of visual texts and ignited the imagination of the viewers. The myths being used by the BSP for mobilizing Dalit communities were influential because of the urge of the communities themselves to gain self-respect and relocate their place in society. The myths thus serve as visual resources for political mobilization which the BSP is using most effectively.

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Table 3.1
Subaltern myths identified for memorialization

	Name	*Caste*	*Region*	*District*
1.	Chhaur	Yadav	Baghelkhand	Rewa, Satna (MP)
2.	Jhalkaribai	Kori	Bundelkhand	Jhansi, Hamirpur, Lalitpur and Banda
3.	Bijli Maharaj	Pasi	Avadh	Lucknow, Bahraich, Barabanki, Jaunpur and Allahabad
4.	Daldev Maharaj	Pasi	Purvanchal	Rae Bareli, Jaunpur and Allahabad
5.	Baaledeen	Pasi	Purvanchal and Avadh	Kausambi and Allahabad
6.	Mahamaya	Buddhist	Purvanchal	Varanasi, Ghazipur, Ballia, Basti and Deoria
7.	Ravidas	Chamar	Purvanchal	Varanasi, Jaunpur, Allahabad and Azamgarh
8.	Vira Pasi	Pasi	Avadh	Pratapgarh, Sultanpur and Allahabad
9.	Udadevi	Pasi	Avadh and Central UP	Allahabad, Pratapgarh and Sultanpur

Source: Compiled from *Jansatta*, 28 July 1997 and other sources.

BARDS, CULTURAL SQUADS AND THE TRANSMISSION OF MYTHS

Various methods are used for transmitting these myths at the grass-roots level. Among them is the use of bards for composing ballads and roving through villages singing them aloud. This is similar to that found among high castes where professional singers called *charan* and *bhaants* narrate the caste glory of each caste through songs and dances (Narayan 2002: 161). In UP, the Pasmangta is a subgroup of the Dalit Pasi caste whose profession is to go to the doors of each Pasi family singing stories taken from their caste history. In their songs about a Pasi hero, the bards succeed in creating a link between the Pasis and these heroes. In return each family donates offerings like rice, turmeric and other objects for consumption. These professional minstrels are however not found among all Dalit castes but only in those castes that claim to be martial communities and erstwhile rulers. With growing education and urbanization this profession is slowly dying out but the songs and ballads composed by them are still part of the oral tradition of these communities and are now being used for identify assertion and political mobilization. One such song narrating the glory of the Pasi caste is as follows:

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Shri ram have raj pasi
Vir pasi, dheer pasi
Biveki aur gambhir pasi
Bijli pasi ke vansh pasi

(Translated)

(Like Shri Ram are the Raj Pasis
Brave Pasis, firm Pasis
Intelligent and steady Pasis
The descendants of Bijli Pasi are the Pasis)[20]

Today *pasmangta geet* (song) has become a generic term for the songs sung by bards among the Dalits. These songs are now used by the BSP to transmit the glory of various castes so as to arouse their caste pride and help construct their identities. The old bards of specific Dalit communities, folk singers, political poets and singers deployed by the BSP for this purpose form part of the Cultural Squad (*Jagriti Dasta*). This squad consists of writers, playwrights, poets, artists and so on, whose job is to write songs, ballads, poems, plays and paint pictures about Dalit consciousness and transmit these messages to the villages through the various cultural performances of that region (Singh 1994: 122). Often they pick up the folk songs and ballads popular in particular regions and rewrite them with words carrying political nuances that will evoke the people at the grass roots. These cultural performances narrate the glory of Dalit icons like Ambedkar, Phule, Mayawati, Kanshi Ram, Jhalkaribai, Udadevi, Bijli Pasi, Avantibai, Mahaviridevi and so on (ibid.: 1–2). These stories, poems and so on are also printed in popular booklets, which the people buy and read at their leisure. The lead singer of the Cultural Squad in Allahabad, Babulal Bhanwra says that when Mayawati (of the BSP) was standing for elections, they used to often perform dramas and musical folk plays (*nautanki*s) based on the lives of female heroes so as to help the audience associate them with Mayawati. In addition they also sing songs written by Dalit poets like Ramesh Chandra Baudh and A.R. Akela. Babulal Bhanwra himself has composed many songs in folk song genres like *kajari*, *biraha*, *doha*, *chaupai*, *chaubela*, *kawwali* and so on through which the singers could transmit the messages of the BSP (see Figure 3.1). A song composed by him in the *pasmangta* genre to arouse the sense of identity among the Dalits at the grass roots is as follows:

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Figure 3.1
Photograph of an election meeting of the BSP in Bundelkhand where R.N. Suman, a Dalit singer, sings the glory of Jhalkaribai

Source: Dalit Resource Centre, G.B. Pant Social Science Institute, Allahabad.

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Bir Dalit dheer Dalit
Buddhiman evam gambhir Dalit
Desh khatir bhaile kurban ho Dalit veeron

(Translated)

(Brave Dalit steady Dalit
Intelligent and firm Dalit
Sacrificing themselves for the country)[21]

Pyarelal, another member of the Cultural Squad of Allahabad said that the squad also screens documentaries on the life of Ambedkar, a film on Dalit heroes produced by NDTV (a TV channel), and Hindi films like *Damul* produced by a famous director Prakash Jha that shows atrocities on Dalits by upper castes, in villages and districts. They also play and sell audio cassettes containing speeches of Kanshi Ram and Mayawati at rallies and political meetings just before the speeches of the local BSP leaders.[22]

Another effective mode for transmitting the political messages of the BSP is the Cycle Squad (*Cycle Dasta*) in which groups of party workers ride cycles across villages and towns shouting slogans. They stop at short intervals to communicate their messages to the people by linking them with the myths of that region (Singh 1994: 1–2) by songs and speeches delivered in the storytelling manner. Organizing functions, rallies and meetings commemorating the birth or death anniversary of Dalit heroes is also a forum for transmitting the political messages of BSP. During her three tenures as chief minister, Mayawati organized numerous functions to inaugurate statues of saints and other great persons revered by Dalits. Various exhibitions were also organized highlighting their achievements, to make the people aware of their glory and self-respect. Through such functions and exhibitions, the myths and caste stories around these heroes reached the Dalits. Kanshi Ram believed that one of the methods for empowering the Dalits is to link them with their genealogies, and caste myths are important means of doing so (ibid.: 14). That is why the mobilizational language of the BSP is heavily loaded with myths and caste legends of the Dalit communities. Repeated evocation of the memory of local and national personalities of these castes helps to consolidate the identity of the depressed castes and subcastes so as to enable them to be effective entities in caste-based competitive politics.

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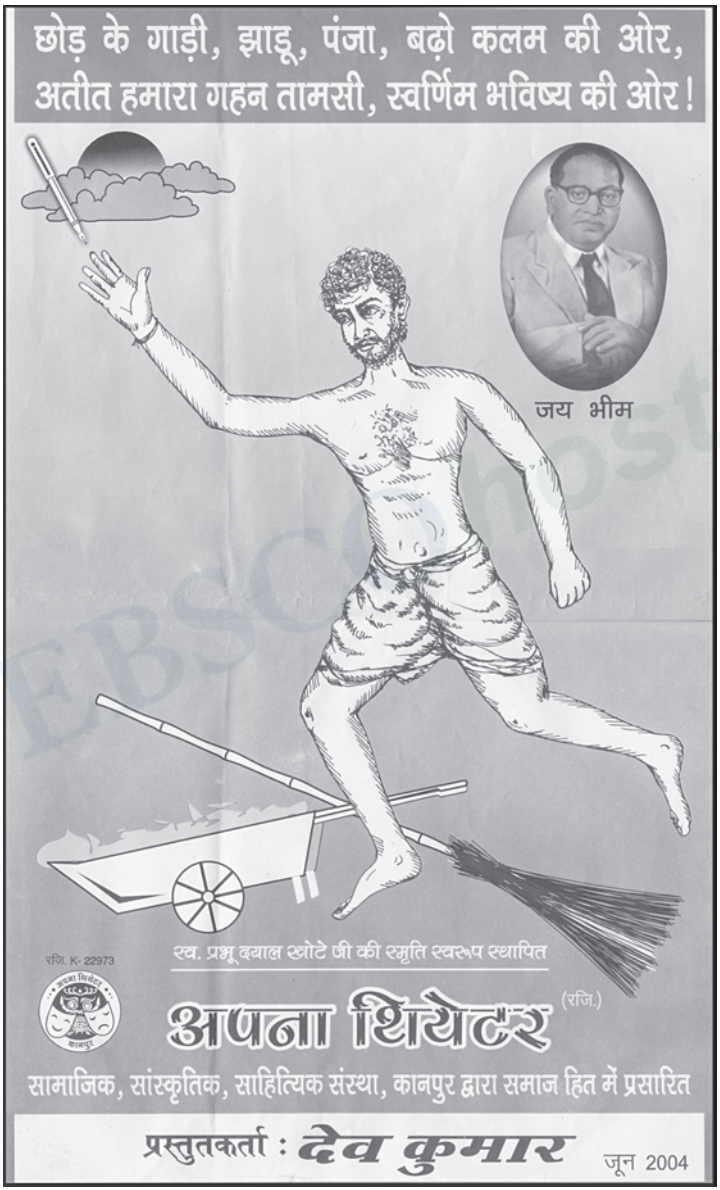
Figure 3.2
Poster of Apna Theatre, a Dalit theatre group active in and around Kanpur



Source: Dalit Resource Centre, G.B. Pant Social Science Institute, Allahabad.

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Along with the Cultural Squad of the BSP many Dalit activist theatre groups also visit villages, districts and small towns of UP and present cultural performances in the form of theatre or *nautanki*s to arouse Dalit consciousness through cultural genres. These groups are active in the regions of Kanpur, Banaras, Allahabad, Lucknow, Bareli, Jhansi and so on.[23] Prominent among such theatres is the Apna Theatre active in Kanpur and other places within UP (see Figure 3.2). It was established by Dev Kumar, a social activist and also a writer of Dalit popular booklets on 14 April 1992. He was dedicated to arousing consciousness among the people of Dalit communities through the medium of this theatre. His first *natak* (drama), *Daastan* was based on ill deeds of the Aryans. His other plays include *Bhadra Angulimaal*, *Chakradhari*, *Sudarshan*, *Kapat*, *Agyat Etihaas* (based on the *veerangana* Udadevi Pasi), *Amar Shaheed Matadin Bhangi* and *Jamadaar Ka Kurta* and so on. Another theatre group by the name of 'Mandali' is popular in Banaras and among the other regions of eastern UP. This theatre group helps people in reliving their glorious past by singing praises of Dalit heroes and histories thereby generating a feeling of honour and pride for their respective castes. Many educated Dalits have also opened schools for Dalit children where cultural programmes are organized on national days like 26 January, 15 August and on important Dalit occasions especially on the birthday of Dr Ambedkar. In these functions, which are targeted towards the Dalit communities living there, children perform plays and dances, recite poems and sing songs narrating incidents of atrocities, injustice, oppression and exploitation to the people of these communities. They also narrate the glory of Dalit heroes, which helps to arouse a sense of pride and glory among the audience. The political message of the BSP is also transmitted through these functions.[24]

Visuals and Rituals

The translation of the heroes of the Dalits into the visual form has added many new elements in the culture of the people of that region. One of them is the emergence and development of rituals that are practiced at the time of celebrations to commemorate a particular hero. During functions organized to celebrate the birth or death anniversary of heroes like Jhalkarbai, Udadevi, Bijli Pasi and so on, secular activities like giving speeches, reciting poems, singing songs or performing dramas, are also accompanied by religious activities like lighting incense sticks, garlanding

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the statues with flowers, decorating them with vermillion and so on. *Mantra*s and chants narrating the glory of these heroes have also emerged and are strongly reminiscent of upper-caste hymns sung while offering prayers. In Jhansi, for example, regular worship (*puja*) is held before the statue of Jhalkaribai, which was installed by the BSP in front of the fort of Rani Laxmi Bai.[25] The sites of these statues are also the venue for poetic conferences where poets from many regions of UP are invited to recite poems invoking the glory of the heroes. In this manner, on the one hand, the statues and the sites around them provide both social and public spaces to Dalits for the expression of their identities, and on the other, they have also led to the creation of rituals and customs, which, while found in abundance among the upper castes, were very few in their communities.

Thus, useful for the political mobilization of Dalit communities, these visual images of these Dalit heroes have also led to the arousal of a strong sense of identity and self-respect among marginalized communities. They have also helped in creating awareness among non-Dalit castes with regard to lower-caste heroes, about which they knew very little, thus raising the prestige and status of these Dalit castes in their eyes.

Notes

1. Field visit to Lucknow and districts adjoining it like Mohanlalganj and Bahraich in April 2004.
2. Field visit to villages surrounding Lucknow on 13 March 2004.
3. Taken from a study done by Gopal Shukla. See Shukla 2003.
4. Field visit to Jittora, Bahraich in April 2004.
5. Field visit to Lucknow in April 2004.
6. Oral interview with O.P. Agrawal, aged seventy, Bahraich, on 24 April 2004.
7. Story narrated by Nasimuddin Siddiqui in an interview given to V.N. Rai, Ramanandsaraswati Pustakalaya, Azamgarh, 1997.
8. Based on oral interviews with respondents, Azamgarh, 19 May 2005.
9. Oral interview with Ram Sharan Ram, Azamgarh, on 5 May 2005.
10. Based on the interviews with Leelavati, Basantram, Vinod Kumar Bharati, Shivnath and other residents of villages Kotwa, Chaukukhurd, Bankat Bazaar, Janpad Azamgarh, on 19 July 2005.
11. *Hindustan*, 21 September 1998.
12. Oral interview with Omkar Singh, Azamgarh, 11 May 2005.
13. Oral interview with Ram Nagina Yadav, Azamgarh, 12 May 2005.
14. Oral interview with sculptor Surjit, Azamgarh, 19 July 2005.
15. Same as Note 9.
16. Oral interview with Sahodar Pasi, Azamgarh, 19 July 2005.
17. Hand written letter by Dr B.R. Ambedkar to Swami Achhutananda, Mathura, February 1932, preserved in the Dalit Resource Centre Archive, Allahabad.

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18. Interview with Lal Singh, an old RPI activist, Pratapgarh, 6 May 1995.
19. Interview with Bhawani Shankar, Kanpur, 3 June 2003.
20. Oral interview with Sukhdev Pasmangta collected in Barwaripur, 26 May 2005.
21. Oral interview with Babulal Bhanwra, Shahabpur, 26 January 2004.
22. Oral interview with Pyarelal, Shahabpur, 26 January 2004.
23. Field visits to different regions of UP during May to July 2005.
24. Field visit to Shahabpur, 26 January 2004.
25. Field visit to Jhansi, June 2005.

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Chapter 4

Identity Politics and New Historical Resources: Dalit Location in 1857 History

> Those who have control over democracy also have control over history.
>
> Dalit writer, S. Rao Sanjeevan Nath

The BSP has always been on the look out for new historical resources that can be added to its repertoire for creating a more influential language to expand its mass base and mobilize more and more communities. These new resources are then transformed into identity resources and disseminated to the people through various mediums, as discussed earlier. However in the process of dissemination, only certain types of heroes emerge as identity markers. These heroes form the master base of the BSP's resources out of which it selects those it considers appropriate for its political mobilization. As mentioned earlier, the 1857 Rebellion is the richest historical resource for the BSP. The heroes of this movement, as projected by the Dalits, are Balluram Mehtar, Udaiya Pasi, Chetram Jatav, Banke Chamar, Ganga Baksh, Beera Pasi, Makka Pasi, Matadin Bhangi. The women heroes of this movement are, among others, Jhalkaribai, Udadevi, Avantibai, Pannadhai and Mahaviridevi (Vidrohi 2004). These heroes form the master base of the BSP. It is noteworthy that the BSP did not find the heroes from other phases in the Indian freedom movement, like Madari Pasi who led the *Kisan Andolan* (Farmer's Rebellion) that took place in UP in 1914 (R.P. Saroj 1997: 27), or the Dalit matyrs of the Chauri Chaura incident (Vidrohi 2004: 176), significant enough to be developed as icons. The heroes picked up by BSP were initially used to mobilize the specific caste groups to which they belonged but gradually they were transformed into icons for the entire Dalit community. For example, when Jhalkaribai was being used for mobilizing

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